

AN ESSAY

9.

ON THE

Pastoral Duties of Ruling Elders:

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THE PASTORAL DUTIES OF RULING ELDERS.

Our denomination is called the Presbyterian Church from the name of its official rulers, who are called Presbyters, and of its tribunals, which are called Presbyteries. We hold that the government of the Church is lodged, *jure divino*, in the hands of Church rulers, whom the Scriptures call Presbyters, or Elders; but that this government is exercised, not severally, as by prelates, but jointly, in Church courts or assemblies, which we hold to be Presbyteries, whether the assemblies be parochial, classical, synodical, national, or œcumenical. Simply as Church governors, we understand the Scriptures to put all Presbyters, whether preaching or ruling, on a parity. There is but one order, namely, that of the Presbyter; there are two officers, namely, that of the teaching Presbyter, or the Minister of the Gospel, and that of the ruling Presbyter, usually among us called the Elder. Hence there are two kinds of power exercised by Church rulers, corresponding in some degree to these offices respectively.

1. There is the *potestas jurisdictionis*, i. e., the power of jurisdiction, which is a joint power, and comprehends every thing which Church courts may do, but which Ministers and Elders, by virtue of office, may not do. Hence, the exercise of discipline in all its grades, all declarative and administrative legislation, including the ordering of

the work of ordination and the authoritative designation of the candidate, and all executive authority necessary to the enforcement of the other powers, taking in the whole work of systematic evangelization, appertain to the power of jurisdiction. Here we have no dispute. The duties belonging to Ministers and Elders, lawfully associated in Church courts, as Presbyterians contend, are precisely the same, and of course are equal.

2. There is the *potestas ordinis*, i. e., the power of order, which is a several power, and comprehends such things as a Minister or Elder may lawfully and authoritatively perform by virtue of office, but which Church courts may not do. The preaching of the Word, the administration of sealing ordinances, the celebration of marriage, the authoritative blessing of the people, and all pastoral functions, appertain to the power of order. Here originates our present inquiry. All three functions, pertaining to the power of order, without question among us, belong to the teaching Presbyter; since we hold that the higher office includes the lower. But do any of them belong to the Ruling Elder by virtue of office? There is no dispute that all public and authoritative teaching, and the administration of the ordinances and rites which the Scriptures sanction, belong wholly to the preaching Presbyter. So that our inquiry narrows itself down to the pastoral functions. Do these belong to our Elders? and if so, what are they?

There are, doubtless, many duties which belong to all Presbyters, whether Ministers or Elders, which are not laid down as ecclesiastical enactments in our Church formularies; since, being several or personal, and for the most part private, it is difficult to see how they could be enforced, although they belong to the power of order. But, besides, their very efficiency depends, in a great measure, on their free and spontaneous discharge. It is difficult to define these duties under any special title; but in this essay we have called them by the name of pastoral duties. The duties of the Pastors of our Churches, or the pastoral duties

of the Minister called to preach, are well understood; and the Church has wisely provided Professors of Pastoral Theology in our Theological Seminaries, by whose lectures these duties are expounded to her candidates for the Ministry. Our Ruling Elders have no such advantages; and the Church has been remiss in furnishing them manuals of instruction in regard to the important and scriptural functions of the office to which the Holy Ghost has called them. Scriptural arguments in vindication of the office itself, we have in abundance, able and valuable. But we know of no concise treatise on the subject of this article. Nor do we expect, in the brief space allotted to us, to accomplish any thing which shall supply this *desideratum*. But we venture to hope we may, with the Divine blessing, be able to make some suggestions which may excite within the breasts of our Ruling Elders who may happen to see these pages, a fresh interest in the subject, which we trust may lead them to a new investigation into the extent of those pastoral duties devolving on them. Let us, then, examine briefly the teachings of the Word of God on this important question.

1. The Apostle Paul enjoins it upon Church officers to exercise great circumspection in their conversation and in their conduct, to rule their own houses well, and to cultivate all Christian graces with diligence. It is true these duties are especially enjoined on the Pastor, (1 Tim., 3: 2-7; 6: 11. Titus 1: 6-8,) but, as the very reason is because he exercises a watchful care over the fold, they apply to the Ruling Elder with equal emphasis. Indeed, they are enjoined on the Pastor because he is an Elder, and hence are of direct obligation on Ruling Elders also. They are of essential importance, because, 1st. The ruler who does not cultivate faithfully the graces of the Christian in his own soul is not in a condition to detect the short-comings of the members of the flock of which he is overseer; nor, should he see cause of admonition in a brother, is his own spiritual state such as to enable him to administer it with that spirit of

earnest and consecrated zeal which is essential to usefulness in the discharge of the duty; and, 2d. If short-comings in the life of a Church ruler, and inefficiency in the control of his own household be very manifest, he cannot either usefully or acceptably exercise authority over others. While men are thinking in their hearts, "Physician, heal thyself," and ready to cast up to him the parable of the man with a beam in his eye undertaking to cast the mote out of his brother's—not only his usefulness, but his respectability as an Elder in the household of faith, is gone.

2. All those private and personal duties which Christians are bound to perform toward their fellow-men under the law of charity, are to be discharged, with authority, by Ruling Elders. That is to say, God requires every Christian man, as opportunity offers, to exert an influence for good on those with whom he is brought into contact, in order to lead them, by the blessing of God, to embrace the Gospel. But the Elder is officially bound, by the virtue of his ordination, to seek opportunities of like usefulness to all who are connected with the congregation of which he is an officer, thus watching for souls. Again: All Christians are bound to aid one another to pursue the Divine life, by reproving, exhorting, and thus helping one another; but the Ruling Elder is bound to discharge all such helpful duties with authority, tempered with gentleness and charity. Once more: Every Christian is bound to let his light so shine before men that they may see his good works; but the Ruling Elder is called of God, and by office is bound to become an example unto the flock, and unto those who are without. To be a little more specific. "Every Christian is bound, in charity, to admonish and reprove his brother that offendeth, first privately, and then before witnesses; and if he hear not, to tell it to the Church." (Lev. 19: 17; Matt. 18: 15-17.) This a Ruling Elder ought to do, by virtue of his calling, and with authority. (1 Thess. 5: 12.) Private Christians ought, in charity, to instruct the ignorant (John 4: 29; Acts 18: 26); to exhort

the negligent (Heb. 3 : 15; 10 : 24, 25); to comfort the afflicted (1 Thess. 5 : 11); to support the weak (1 Thess. 5 : 14); to restore him that falleth (Gal. 6 : 1); to visit the sick (Matt. 25 : 36, 40); to reconcile those who are at variance (Matt. 5 : 9); to contend for the truth, and to answer for it (Jude, v. 3; 1 Peter 3 : 15);—all which are incumbent to the Ruling Elder by the authority of his calling.* These examples and proofs abundantly illustrate the proposition before us, that it is the duty of Ruling Elders, arising from their calling, “to do by authority that which other Christians ought to do in charity; which is their power of order.” †

3. Whilst the Minister who has special charge of a particular Church is fitly called, among the Reformed Churches, the Pastor, by way of eminence, since his whole life is devoted to the one work, yet it is a mistake to suppose that no pastoral duties pertain to the office of Ruling Elder. When the Apostle was addressing the Elders at Ephesus, he exhorted them “to feed the Church of God.” The Greek word ‡ translated “feed,” is derived from the Greek word § translated “pastor,” or “shepherd,” and means, absolutely and radically, “to keep flocks, to be a shepherd,” or pastor; and “metaphorically, to tend, cherish, mind; to take care of, guide, govern.” || But as the principal duties of a shepherd are “to feed and to tend,” it may so be translated, as it is in our version. Hence, it is the duty of the Elder “to be a shepherd” to the flock, “to feed the Church of God”—in a word, to be, not *the* Pastor, but *a* Pastor, to the Church of which he is a ruler. Wherefore, he is bound to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the mourner, to nourish the children of the Church, and, in all the ways by which God gives him opportunity, to edify the body of Christ. Since these duties are all private, pastoral visitation is one

* Gillespie's “Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland,” Ch. II., last paragraph.

† Ibid.

‡ Ποιμαίνω.

§ Ποιμήν.

|| Liddell and Scott's Greek Lexicon.

of the duties of the Ruling Elder; for it is not possible that the Ruling Elder should discharge them, unless he sees and knows the people at home—gains their confidence—makes them to see and realize that he truly cares for their spiritual welfare; and thus, having secured the road to their hearts, he may become a friend in need, who is a friend indeed.

4. There is doubtless a special propriety in calling the Minister of a particular Church, *the* bishop of it, for the same reason he is called the Pastor, i. e., by way of eminence. But the title bishop, as used in the New Testament Scriptures, is not the name of an office of the Church; but of a function of the office of Presbyter, i. e., it describes a class of duties. This, even our Episcopal brethren do not deny,* who found their doctrine of Episcopacy on the belief in the perpetuation of the apostolic office, which they claim their prelacy to be. But as the term is used in the Scriptures, it always designates a class of duties pertaining to an office. The word bishop means an overseer, and from its definition, it is evident that the officer, whose duties it describes, must be a ruler; and reciprocally, that a man who is a ruler must, of necessity, take an oversight of those over whom he is called to exercise rule. Hence the Apostle Paul, in the address to the Ephesian Elders, already alluded to, calls them overseers, or bishops. The duties of a bishop, as given in the New Testament, do not belong to the power of jurisdiction; and hence are not brought into exercise in Church courts. They are several, not joint functions. But, at the same time, the duties arising therefrom, are pre-supposed and must be previously discharged by those who exercise jurisdiction in Church courts. For example: A Church court is under the necessity of exercising discipline. But this must result from the oversight of the flock, in which way alone can the knowledge out of which dis-

* "It is scarcely necessary to remark that in the New Testament, the words *ἐπισκοπος* and *πρεσβυτερος* are convertible." Conybeare and Howison, Vol. II., p. 218.

cipline arises, be ascertained. As the duties pertaining to the exercise of discipline belong equally to every member of a Church court, the duties of a bishop devolve, as well by the very language of the Bible as by the necessity of office, on every Church ruler, whether minister or elder.

5. The Apostle speaks of a certain class of Church officers, which he calls "helps," which are usually understood among the Reformed Churches to be Ruling Elders, although some think these "helps" to be deacons. Taking the former sense, and the designation is most appropriate, since Ruling Elders are appointed to aid the minister, in all suitable ways, in promoting the spiritual good of the flock. We shall have occasion, in another place, to exhibit some of the ways in which Elders may give essential aid to the minister with whom they are associated in the care of the Churches.

Scarcely
Elders
Little

That all these duties, or classes of duties, which we have described, belong to Ruling Elders, *jure divino*, is made further manifest, from the fact that, in the primitive Church, there was no distinction between the teaching and ruling Elders, so far as the office itself was concerned. All were then elected and set apart as Presbyters, and the whole Bench of Elders, constituting the Parochial Presbytery, or, as we now call it, the Church Session, divided out the various duties according to the Providential gifts of its respective members. And so the Apostle commands, in Rom. 12: 6-8: "Having then gifts, differing according to the grace that is given unto us, whether prophecy, let us prophecy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation"; "he that ruleth, with diligence," etc. And so every man was appointed to discharge those public duties for which he was endowed with gifts; but the more private and personal duties appertained to them all, not jointly, but severally. At the present age of the world, we make the distinction

between teaching and ruling Elders more marked, as a matter of necessity; because, since the original languages of the Scriptures have passed away from speech, it is needful that the Church should know that those appointed to preach have made the acquirements necessary to enable them to expound the Word. In all other respects, the two offices stand with us just where they stood in the Apostolic Church. Indeed, we literally obey the injunction of the Apostle, and remember, in calling men to office in the Church, that we have "gifts, differing according to the grace that is given unto us."

Now, in view of these principles, derived from the Word of God, according to the doctrine of Presbytery, it is very clear that the pastoral duties of Ruling Elders are many and important, viz: 1. All those exemplary and helpful duties of religion, which ordinary Christians discharge under the law of charity, they must fulfil by way of authority. 2. All those functions of office included in the expressions pastor, bishop, and "helps," pertain to them by virtue of office. Let us consider them, now, in a more direct and practical manner.

1. Ruling Elders ought to pray with the people over whom they exercise authority.* The times and circumstances may be determined by the indications of Providence. But, as a general rule, we may say that a Church, where the people do not meet for prayer, is in a languishing condition. The Minister may pray for them, and he may pray with them. But when it is wholly left to him by the Elders and the people, the feeling becomes very strong that the business of prayer is ministerial—that it is the Minister's official duty, because he is employed for the purpose; and that he does it simply because he is paid for it. It has the effect, moreover, of leading persons to go to the House of God, not to pray, but to be entertained by listen-

* We have taken it for granted that all Elders have family prayer—although we have a sad fear that many neglect it.

ing to the prayers of the Minister. The result is, that formal religion and deadness creep in; and however much we may oppose forms in our principles, we derive all their worst effects by our practice. But when the Elders, as the leaders of the people, with an earnest zeal unite with the Minister in trying to develop a devotional spirit among the members of the Church, a new interest must inevitably be created, and a deeper feeling of responsibility be excited among the members for the progress of the Church and the advancement of Christ's cause among them. Hence, the Elders ought to establish prayer-meetings, whether at the usual place of public worship, and all together, or in special districts, may be determined by the circumstances of the Church, and especially its size.

Again: Elders ought to meet with and pray with the members of the Church at their homes, and especially with the widows and fatherless in their affliction, which we are told is an essential part of true practical religion. It may, indeed, be said, such duties also belong to the Pastor, and can be discharged much more acceptably by him. We grant it, but we are now discussing the responsibilities of Ruling Elders, not those of the Pastor. The fact that Pastors have corresponding obligations resting on them, does not exempt the Elder from his, any more than the fact that these duties devolve on the Elder exempts the Minister. But besides: How often can a Minister be expected to visit and pray with each family or person in a large congregation? If he prepare himself, according to his special vocation, to preach the Gospel properly, it is certain that the leaving of this matter to him is very much the same as leaving it undone. But this brings us to say—

3. Ruling Elders are bound, by virtue of their office, systematically and regularly, to visit the members of the Church in their official capacity. The idea that all pastoral visiting belongs to the Minister is false in point of doctrine, as we have elsewhere proved, and is ruinous to the spiritual

interests of a Church. The Pastors of our large congregations find it impossible, in the midst of their other duties, to visit their people oftener than once a year. In smaller Churches, they may, by hard and fatiguing labor, get around twice a year. In order to protect her Ministers against the clamors of unreasonable people, and at the same time to excite Ministers to a careful discharge of their duties, the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland recommend "that ministers visit all the families in their parish at least once a year, if the same be large; and oftener, if the parish be small." Now, if the pastor have no other official way of learning the wants of his people, how can he faithfully administer the Gospel message, or usefully discharge his vocation? Here is seen the utility and manifest necessity of "helps." It is very true, the Elders may say that they cannot accomplish this pastoral visitation, any more than the Minister can. But then, our Sessions ought to be large; and the congregation ought to be divided out into districts or classes, amongst them. Every member of the Session ought to have a certain number of families to visit and care for, as to their spiritual interests; and every member of the Church ought to know which Elder has his special oversight. This arrangement would make this matter of visitation easy for the Elders. The number of families for each would be few. He would in a short time become familiarly acquainted with the families and persons committed to him, and would find it soon becoming a pleasure, instead of a mere duty. And now, how helpful might not such an arrangement as this be made to the Pastor? Whenever his presence was needed in any part of the Church he would have a direct and official way of knowing it. He could ascertain where there was sickness; he could learn of cases of religious concern; he could drop in, unawares, upon the desponding disciple, as an angel visitant;—in a word, the widow, the orphan, the poor, the friendless, the stranger, the isolated female, as well as the

families of the Church, would all be systematically cared for, first by the Elders; secondly, by the Pastor. And then, how much more valuable the visits of the Pastor, made under such circumstances, than, as otherwise they often must be, merely visits of friendship. Now, he would go to comfort, to instruct, to sympathize, to warn, and to pray, when most needed.

Besides, how many pious females are there, living in Christian isolation, who are deprived of the privilege and help of family worship! What a blessed means of grace might it not become to them if the faithful and pious Elder, who should thus be appointed to their special oversight, would frequently call in and have a brief season of prayer with them! But we cannot enlarge on this point. Its advantages are so manifold they will occur to every thoughtful person.

3. As one part of the duties of the Elder is to feed the flock, it becomes him to instruct and to comfort the mourner, as he may obtain grace and find opportunity. In addition to personal interviews and conversation, he may do much in this behalf by circulating the Bible, along with religious tracts and books, among the destitute; and by bringing to the notice of persons able to purchase, such religious books and papers as may be adapted to their spiritual wants. The humble tract, even casually distributed, has brought salvation to many a household; and the desponding Christian has been encouraged, the mourner's tears have been dried, and the backsliding Christian reclaimed, by the pages of the Christian volume brought to his notice at the fitting time; while the zeal of the professing disciple is constantly stimulated by the religious newspaper, through which we learn of the wonders of the grace of God displaying itself among the nations.

Some of our Sessions, in accordance with this idea, make it a rule to keep on hand a good supply of Bibles, tracts, religious books, etc., for the use of its members, at their

own discretion, whenever opportunity offers; and every member is expected to draw from the common stock as occasion may demand. The Congregational Library might be used with a like advantage.

4. The Elders are especially under obligations to care for our baptized youth. By the ordinance of God they are introduced into the Church, to be trained up for His honor and glory. Such means of grace as the adult Christian regularly enjoys in the sanctuary are profitable to children in a degree, even from their earliest infancy; but assuredly they need other and special means of religious culture. The Sabbath School ought to be everywhere employed, under the guidance of our Elders, for their instruction in the Bible, and in the doctrines of the Church, by means of the Catechisms. In like manner, those more advanced in years ought to be collected into Bible classes and instructed by the Elders, wherever God has given them the gifts. So, also, ought the fidelity and zeal of Christian parents to be observed, unfaithfulness to be marked, and the kind word of exhortation given at a fit time, and with a right spirit. Again: The baptized youth, who may be seen to wander from his moral integrity, or falling into temptation, ought to be quickly warned of his danger and exhorted to return. These duties, all so simple and easy of fulfilment, how blessed might they not become to parents and to our baptized youth, when fitly and faithfully discharged! The Elder can see and know these opportunities of usefulness when the Minister cannot, and may thus be blessed of God in checking the unfaithfulness of parents at its first manifestation, and may arrest the downward course of the consecrated son or daughter at the first step.

5. As the discipline of the Church is lodged in the hands of the Ruling Elders, they are especially bound to take that oversight of the Church which lies at the basis of all discipline. In this respect, the wisdom of God, in appointing Elders of the people as Church rulers, is mani-

fest and wonderful. The Pastor, in a certain sense, is isolated from the people, and his very presence throws a restraint around their conduct. This ought not so to be; but, alas, it is too much the case. Hence, he has no personal means of ascertaining the downward steps of the tempted and wayward Christian; and no means at all, except such as are public. But the Ruling Elder, who is one of themselves, if watchful, taking heed to himself and the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made him an overseer, can see, and, by the blessing of God, may arrest and counteract, the effects of the temptations of the world and the evil one; and may thereby become the means of saving a soul from death, and covering a multitude of sins. Again: The member of the Church who has fallen into sin can hide it from the eye of his Pastor, while his hypocrisy may be known to the public; and may cause the enemy to blaspheme. But the Elder, whose walk is with the people, can see and know every thing, and bring the matter into judgment, thereby saving the Church from scandal, and delivering the name of Christ from reproach.

Not only do these duties properly arise from the functions of the office of Ruling Elder, but Ruling Elders ought to save the Pastor from the necessity of attending to such matters. If the Pastor has first to hear a whisper of evil, and then himself to start around to hunt up the facts, which are always told him with much reluctance and after great trouble, the result is, he becomes odious, and is looked upon as an inquisitor. People fear to see him, lest he come to ask them to turn informers on some one; and he is sure to forfeit the good will of the party implicated, whether found guilty or innocent. Again: If the private exhortation and admonition of members be wholly devolved on him, his presence in the families of his own people becomes a terror to them, but more especially to the young, for they would always be in fear of ministerial censures and official rebukes. But the Elder, as he mingles freely with them,

can speak to them casually, as he may have chance opportunity, without the fear of any such result.

Now, the Pastor's usefulness and success depend almost absolutely, under God, on his enjoying the love and the unquestioning confidence of his people. But all fear drives out love, while it engenders hate. Hence, our experience is, that the Minister who takes the initiative in any case of troublesome discipline, or who allows himself to become the prosecutor of the case, loses his hold on his people thereby, and soon has to vacate his post. But, on the other hand, a slight estrangement from the Elders soon wears off and passes away.

6. As the higher office includes the lower, the duties of Deacons pertaining to the money-tables, wherever this latter class of officers is not existent, belong to Ruling Elders. We do not now refer to the business matters of the congregation, which do not pertain to spiritual functions, but to benevolent funds, designed for the poor, and for the work of evangelization, in its many forms. It is just as certain, in our view, that it is the duty of the Christian to contribute to the cause of Christ, as it is that he ought to pray; nor do we believe he can grow in grace, if he neglect the former, any more than he can if he neglect the latter, and thus the Minister must teach and preach. But the whole matter of inaugurating in practice the teaching of the pulpit, belongs to the Elders and Deacons.

Ordinarily, a Minister ought not to visit his people to raise subscriptions for benevolent objects, nor ought he to go around with an agent among them on any such business. If he does, the result is, the people associate his presence with begging, and whenever they see him with a strange Minister, they involuntarily seize hold of their purse-strings, and begin to draw them tighter. A man, moreover, may have good or bad reasons for refusing to give. If his reasons be good, and at the same time he love his Pastor, he becomes mortified at having to state them to

him. If his reasons be insufficient, such as manifestly arise from the avarice of the heart, or from utter indifference to the interests of the cause of Christ, not only is he mortified at being obliged to give them, but he thinks bad things in his heart about his Pastor, for compelling him to do so. Now, we must deal with the human heart as we find it; and judging by what we know of it, it is very sure this may, and eventually will, excite dislike, engender hatred, and foment discontent. But the Elder or Deacon, being one of the people, can approach them on an equality and with freedom, and they can converse with him with easy familiarity, and without embarrassment.

7. During religious awakenings, the Ruling Elder who carries out these principles in their true spirit may become of immense advantage to the Minister, and may render himself very useful, in bringing persons to the House of God, in seeking out the convicted and interested, in putting suitable books into their hands, in conversing and praying with them, and in leading them to see the Minister, or the Minister to see them. But here, again, it is not necessary to enlarge, as what he have said elsewhere, and on other heads, is equally applicable to the point in hand.

8. All the duties which we have enforced, become especially binding on Elders of vacant Churches. When the instruction of the pulpit is wanting, so much more needful is it that the people should enjoy such means of grace as God has yet left them, in the hands of their board of Elders. It is true, the Elders may not preach, nor administer the sacraments; but they can meet with the people, as our form of government enjoins them to do (see ch. XXI.), and can pray with them and for them; they can read the Bible, and pious discourses suitable for the purpose, and they can sing together the praises of God. And if any one of them have a word of exhortation, let him exhort to the edifying of all. Many evil consequences arising from a vacancy in the pulpit may be averted in this way; the Church can be kept

together, and thus the sympathies of the members may be drawn out for one another, while in answer to their united prayers, they may hope that God will bless them in sending a Minister, on whom they can unite their voices, as the under shepherd, to go in and out before them. Moreover, during a period of vacancy, the Eldership ought to take special oversight of the flock, in reference to the consistency of their lives, and to observe every occasion for the exercise of discipline. Such things ought never to be allowed to rest until a Pastor is obtained. No Minister can feel happy in entering on his pastorate, if he have to signalize his opening ministry by purging the Church roll. Rather let the Elders attend to cases of discipline as they may arise, and thus keep the roll clean, so that the Minister may enter on his work with faith and courage, and pursue it with joy.

It may be objected, that these views are an innovation on the principles of our ecclesiastical polity. But this is a mistake. In the venerable Presbyterian Churches of Scotland and Ireland, the Elders divide the congregations into districts, each Elder having charge of an appointed bounds; for official visitation and special oversight, within which Sabbath Schools, Bible and Catechetical Classes, and Prayer-Meetings, are committed to him; and thus he exercises the very authority, and discharges the very duties, for which we contend. Let us look at this historical point for a moment.

In the First Book of Discipline, ch. 10, sec. 3, it is said that the Elders, at their induction, must be admonished of their office, "which is, to assist the Ministers in all public affairs of the Kirk, to wit: in determining and judging causes, in giving admonition to the licentious liver, in having respect to the manners and conversation of all men within their charge. For, by the gravity of the seniors, the light and unbridled life of the licentious must be corrected and bridled." Now, when the plain reader is told

that the officer designated by the names Presbyter, Senior or Senator, and Elder, is the same, and that all these words mean the same thing—the word Presbyter coming to us from the Greek language, the word Senior from the Latin, and the word Elder from the Saxon—it will be made clear to him, that the principles for which we contend are distinctly, but comprehensively, set forth in the above quotation.

But the Second Book of Discipline is equally explicit in its teachings, and more full in its statements. In chapter 6, which treats of “Elders and their Office,” beginning at the middle of sec. 3, it speaks as follows:

“What manner of persons they ought to be, we refer it to the express word of God, and namely, the canons written by the Apostle Paul. 4. Their office is as well severally as conjointly, to watch diligently upon the flock committed to their charge, both publicly and privately, that no corruption of religion or manners enter therein. 5. As Pastors and Doctors should be diligent in teaching and sowing the seed of the Word, so the Elders should be careful in seeking the fruit of the same in the people. 6. It appertains to them to assist the Pastor in examination of them that come to the Lord’s Table; *item*, in visiting the sick. 7. They should cause the acts of the Assemblies, as well particular as general, to be put in execution carefully. 8. They should be diligent in admonishing all men of their duty, according to the rule of the evangel. Things that they cannot correct by private admonitions, they should bring to the assemblies of the Eldership.”

This quotation is verbatim, but we have used the modern spelling. The rest of the chapter has reference to the power of jurisdiction, which does not concern our present discussion. Certainly, no one can read the above declaration of principles without seeing in it every thing we have maintained in this essay.

In enforcing the above principles, the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland has passed many enactments, all tending in the same direction. In the Collection of Stuart of Pardovan, Book I., Title 6, “of Ruling Elders,” we are told, in sec. 8, that “it is appointed that every Elder have a certain bounds assigned him, that he may visit the same

every month, at least, and to report to the Session what scandals or abuses are therein, or what persons have entered without testimonials; and it were fit that, then, some time were set apart for prayer; and it were also fit that Elders should always keep an exact list of all examinable persons within their quarters, and thereunto put marks to distinguish communicants from the ignorant and scandalous, and the poor and indigent from such as need not." Moreover, in the Compendium of the Laws of the Church of Scotland, p. 335, in enjoining the duty and the manner of ministerial visitation of families, which is to be at the least once a year, it is recommended that the Minister "be accompanied with the Elder of the bounds; with whom he may confer, before they go forth to the work, about the state and condition of the persons and families of these bounds, that the Minister may be able to speak more suitably to their condition and as may be most for edification." Both these enactments certainly concur with the sentiments of this essay. Other extracts could be given, illustrative of the principles and practice of the Church of Scotland, all to the same purpose. But we have given enough. In more recent times, since the establishment of Sabbath Schools, these are committed to the Elder of the bounds, who has charge of the same, in subordination to the Session.

Our principles are certainly no innovation on Presbyterianism, since we have shown that they are entirely in accordance with the primitive and present usages of the ancient churches of Scotland and Ireland;* and, however much we as a Church may have come short of our duty in reference to this matter, we are happy to know that these principles have not wholly been ignored by our Elders. We have known of Sessions of our Church, which have attempted, and that with much success and great benefit,

* The Collections of Stuart of Pardovan are used in all the Presbyterian Churches, both of Scotland and Ireland. All our quotations save one are taken from it.

to carry into effect the foregoing theoretical views; and we have known other Sessions to adopt one or another of the principles of action recommended. We can truly say, we never knew even the attempt to be made without our seeing good as the result. As illustrative of this, we desire here to introduce a short extract, which we have seen in a number of newspapers, but do not know where it originated. The Dr. Richards alluded to is doubtless the late Rev. Dr. James Richards, successively Pastor at Norristown and Newark, N. J., and afterward Professor of Theology at Auburn. These "Facts for Elders" bear the signature of "J. F. T.," viz :

"Some changes for the worse have seemingly taken place in the practical performance of the duties of the Eldership. The day was, when the Elders of the Churches constituted a very efficient band of laborers, doing a great deal more than merely to admit, dismiss and discipline members. The diary of an Elder in one of our leading Churches, under the ministrations of the late Dr. Richards, showed the fact that the Elders divided the congregation into districts, and visited every family without the Pastor. The work was accomplished principally in the *evening*, it being found difficult to meet the members of the different families at any other time. The Elders went two and two, conversing and praying with the people. The apprentices and 'help' were called together in almost all cases, and that class, so much neglected in our day, was faithfully warned. The diary alluded to states the interesting fact, that, by this system, many cases were brought to light which needed the special attention of the Pastor—such as professors in despondency or difficulty, or persons in an anxious or skeptical state of mind. Such cases were reported to Dr. Richards, who had a remarkable tact in dealing with them. It is a well-known fact that very many persons, who need and wish spiritual counsel, are very reluctant to ask it. If they are fortunate enough to be sought out, they will obtain the much-needed counsel; otherwise, they will probably go without it, to their serious injury. In the Church alluded to, I have been told that it was often a matter of surprise to such persons, that the Pastor should 'happen in' so opportunely! They sometimes called it 'a special Providence'—attaching to it the quality of the semi-miraculous, whereas the mercy came through the agency of efficient Elders, who were constantly acting as overseers of the flock committed to their trust. The results, as I have been told, were remarkable, since scarce a communion season occurred without additions from the world. People abroad spoke admiringly of the *Pastor*, as a successful Minister, gathering jewels for Christ. And, indeed, they could not say too much of his searching,

and often *tearful* sermons, with which he moved his great congregation. But, undoubtedly, long before this, it has appeared that the successful ministry of that great man was, in part, owing to the faithfulness of the Elders, all of whom, but one, have 'departed this life, in hope of a better.'

One of the number was noted for the single-eyed service which he rendered constantly in his office of Elder. Some Elders content themselves with visiting the people occasionally with the Pastor, and their visits savor so much of the *official* as to keep them from a close contact with the people. There is no 'happening in' at the right time, not merely to say a word directly on religion, but to show sympathy with this sufferer, to encourage this widow, and to speak a kind word to this child who does his duty at school. The Elder to whom I refer was noted for his industry in business and his promptness in every engagement of life; and yet he was more noted for the holy skill he manifested in using up the "odds and ends" of time, and for making even his times of business occasions for exercising the functions of his office. For instance, he has an item of business 'on the hill,' or 'down town,' and going or returning he would 'just run in' to see 'old Mr. A.,' or to inquire after 'Widow B.'s health,' or to ask Mrs. C. if she did not need a little help in paying her rent, or to drop a word to Mrs. D., whom he saw weeping during the last Sunday's discourse. And so scarcely a day passed in which this single-eyed Elder did not find some opportunity to bear his part in the Eldership, even in the busiest season. He did not make long visits, usually. Very often he would stop at the door, and, with whip and hat in hand, say a 'good morning,' with some good, comforting word, that would be as a perpetual sunbeam in the house after he was gone. And thus he circulated, in this easy and effectual way, through the congregation. There was not a house to which he was not welcome, nor a person to whom he could not speak on the great theme which engrossed his affections. When he died, his brethren lamented over him as an extraordinary worker, and a good man.

"In this case, the Elder was possessed of excellent sense, sound judgment, much intelligence; but at the foundation of his admirable qualities was his piety, and then his practical recognition of the solemn vows he had made when ordained as an Elder.

"I recall the case of another Elder, famous for his efficiency. In him there was no guile, and he had that directness of purpose which often gave him success where greater tacticians would have failed. He had great clearness of mind and power of argument, so that, in determining his own duty, he was not very liable to mistake, and then he could combat the wrong positions of others. But it was not mere intelligence which gave him his power as a spiritual adviser, an exhorter, a comforter, a pacificator. It was rather his ripe godliness, and his appreciation of the vows he had made as an Elder. I have known him to meet, successfully, cases of perplexity which his Pastor could not, and which he ought not, to undertake. Our dear old Elder

would state his views so clearly, so lovingly, and yet so firmly, that the boldest found it difficult to resist him. He, too, died in a good old age; but to this day, those who knew him speak of him with a tenderness which shows how blessed is the memory of a faithful Elder."

No one can read the previous discussion, as illustrated by the statement just quoted, without being sadly impressed with the conviction that our Elders generally come far short of their duty. Indeed, the conviction that such is the case seems to be very general among the Elders themselves, as manifested in the proceedings of various conventions held by them on the subject, and by a corresponding revival of interest in their official work, seen in many places. We thank God for it, and would pray that His Holy Spirit may descend and dwell richly in the hearts of our Elders, so that they may obtain grace to come forth with a fresh consecration to the discharge of their whole duty. What a glorious day would it be for the Kingdom of Christ, could the ten thousand ruling Elders of the Presbyterian Church be aroused to a true sense of their responsibility, and be led to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty! What wondrous blessings might we not expect from the mighty hand of the God of Jacob, upon our languishing Churches!

In conclusion, let us exhort our brethren of the Ruling Eldership to consider, prayerfully and solemnly, their duty and their accountability. The Apostle commands you to "take heed to *yourselves*," as well as to the flock. This you ought to do, in two particulars. 1st. You are to take heed that you seek the best spiritual gifts, in order to your own fitness for the work. 2d. You are to take heed that sin be not found at your door, on account of a fearful neglect of your ordination vows, as well as of the gifts which God has given you. So, also, you are commanded to magnify your office, which is a common duty of all Church officers. We, who are officers of the Church of Christ, are called of God to discharge duties which He de-

volves upon us, according to our respective offices. Let us, therefore, repent of our sins of short-coming, let us bemoan our want of faith, and, taking fresh courage in the strength of our covenant-keeping God, let us arise and go forth to the work to which He has called us, and let us resolve by His grace to discharge every duty, and to fulfil every trust, looking for the abundant blessing of His spirit, according to His promise.